

**NEW
JERSEY**



COPS



Passing the torch

Rowing for aerobic fitness

■ BY MATT BRZYCKI

There's no question that police officers need to have an adequate level of aerobic fitness. In fact, aerobic fitness is the most important aspect of your physical profile and the best indicator of your overall health. Specifically, your aerobic fitness is a measure of how well your muscles consume, transport and utilize oxygen during physical activities.



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The best way for you to improve your aerobic fitness is through aerobic training. The primary target of aerobic training is your Aerobic System. This "energy pathway" is responsible for efforts that are of low intensity and prolonged duration.

Aerobic training is needed to establish a solid foundation of aerobic support which helps you during other forms of physical training. When used in conjunction with sound nutritional practices, aerobic training also helps you to maintain your percentage of body fat at an acceptable level. And by increasing your aerobic fitness, you'll surrender less quickly to fatigue. Among other things, this means that when you exert yourself physically in the line of duty, you won't be nearly as exhausted. Along these lines, aerobic training will lower your resting heart rate which can have a direct impact on your performance. By reducing your resting heart rate, for example, it will be easier for you to maintain a good sight picture and trigger control.

ROWING

A wide range of activities can be used to improve your aerobic fitness. The preferred types of aerobic activities are those that require a continuous effort, are rhythmic in nature and involve large amounts of muscle mass.

One activity that's been gaining favor among the law-enforcement and military communities is rowing, particularly that which is done on an indoor rower. Let's take a look at some of the advantages of rowing.

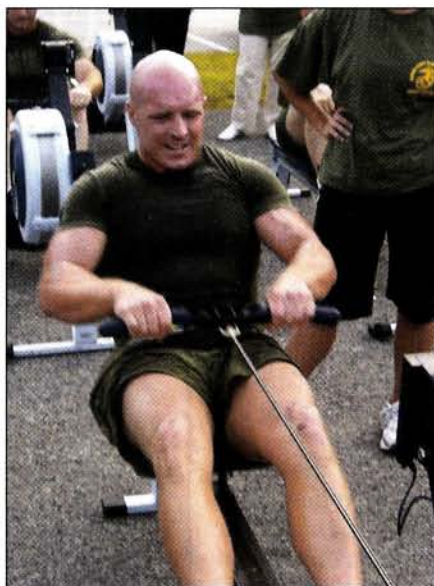


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Advantages

As an aerobic activity, rowing has much to offer. For one thing, rowing involves the coordinated efforts of nearly all of your major muscles: your hips, quadriceps, hamstrings, upper back, biceps, forearms and lower back. No other aerobic activity engages this amount of muscle mass.

Exercising continuously with such an enormous amount of muscle mass can produce a sizeable expenditure of calories. This, of course, is a critical consideration for individuals who are looking to lose or maintain weight. And because so much muscle mass is involved, rowing can be an extremely demanding activity. This is almost certainly one reason why rowing is so appealing to the police and military.

Another advantage of rowing is that it's a low-impact activity. These types of activities carry a lower risk of orthopedic stress and overuse injuries than high-impact activities.

Technique

Although you don't need the skill of an Olympic oarsman, rowing does require some degree of technique. Using proper technique is especially important so that you obtain maximum benefits from rowing and reduce your risk of sustaining an injury.

It's far beyond the scope of this brief column to provide you with a detailed

analysis of rowing technique. However, here's a basic tutorial:

A rowing stroke has four phases: the catch, drive, finish and recovery. In the catch phase, grasp the handle, bend your hips and legs, lean forward slightly and straighten your arms. In the drive phase, push (or "drive") with your hips and legs. Then, gradually bend your arms and extend your torso backward. In the finish phase, pull the handle to your abdomen, straighten your legs and lean backward slightly. In the recovery phase, reverse the order. First straighten your arms. Then, lean forward slightly and gradually bend your hips and legs. This sequence of four phases should be repeated for each subsequent stroke.

In rowing, a typical mistake is trying to do the strokes as quickly as possible. The number of strokes that you take each minute is known as the "stroke rate." Your stroke rate should be in the mid to upper 20s. When the stroke rate exceeds about 30, it will result in poor technique. Also note that the recovery phase should take a little more time to complete than the drive phase.

Now What?

There's a good chance that your fitness center will have indoor rowers. If not, purchasing one for your home is relatively inexpensive and a good investment (assuming, of course, that you'll use it on a regular basis). If you decide to go that route, look for a rower from a reputable manufacturer that gives a true simulation or feeling of actually pulling an oar through water.

THE BOTTOM LINE

With its many advantages, rowing offers an excellent opportunity for you to improve your aerobic fitness. ♥

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